

ON THE FERMI THEORY OF β -RADIOACTIVITY

BY

E. J. KONOPINSKI

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY,
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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On the Fermi Theory of β -RadioactivityE. J. KONOPINSKI AND G. E. UHLENBECK, *Department of Physics, University of Michigan*

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A comparison of Fermi's formula for the distribution in energy of the electrons and positrons emitted by radioactive bodies with the observed spectra seems to show that a basic factor in it, the statistical factor, is not asymmetric enough. Since about the same degree of asymmetry is common to the spectra of light and heavy nuclei and of positron and electron emitters, it cannot be ascribed to another factor in the Fermi formula, depending on the nuclear field. A weight factor is introduced to provide the

required asymmetry by changing the form of the Fermi interaction energy. It is shown that two almost equivalent points of view can be employed in attacking this problem and that a certain uniqueness in the form of the interaction law can be obtained within the requirements laid down by Fermi. The modified distribution formula, which holds strictly only for light nuclei, is then shown to give a much more satisfactory agreement with the data than the original formula.

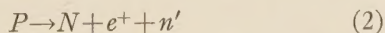
§1. INTRODUCTION

FOLLOWING a suggestion by Pauli that the continuous character of the β -disintegration spectra may be due to the emission of a second, unobserved particle together with each electron, Fermi¹ has developed a theory of β -decay, which is in general agreement with the experimental facts. This second particle, the neutrino, makes possible the fulfillment of the conservation laws, and owes its ability to escape detection to its zero charge, and to the smallness of its mass and its magnetic moment.²

The mathematical formulation of the Fermi theory is quite analogous to the quantum theory of radiation. Corresponding to the transition of an atom from an excited state to the normal state with emission of a light quantum, there is the transition of a heavy particle in the nucleus from a "neutron state" to a "proton state" with emission of an electron and a neutrino. This can be represented by the reaction:



In the case of positron emitters, on the other hand, one has:



representing the transition from the proton state of the heavy particle to the neutron state. Here the second particle should properly be called, according to Fermi's formulation of the theory, an "antineutrino."³

One can write the result Fermi obtains for the probability of emission of an electron or positron with an energy (including the rest energy) between W and $W+dW$ and a maximum energy W_0 :⁴

$$P(W)dW = G^2 |M|^2 F(Z, W) (W_0 - W)^2 \times (W^2 - 1)^{1/2} W dW. \quad (3)$$

From this follows the lifetime τ according to:

$$1/\tau = \int_1^{W_0} P(W) dW. \quad (4)$$

In (3), G is a dimensionless constant which measures the strength of the coupling between the heavy particle and the "electron-neutrino field." To explain the slowness of β -decay, Fermi has to assume this constant to be very small, of the order of magnitude 10^{-13} .⁵ M is a matrix element (containing the wave functions of the heavy particle), which enters into the theory in the same way that the matrix element of the dipole moment enters radiation theory. Fermi connects the two curves of Sargent's⁶ well-known graph relating the lifetime and the maximum energy with "allowed" and "forbidden" transitions, corresponding to different values of $|M|^2$ and in analogy to the dipole and quadrupole transitions of radiation theory. $F(Z, W)$ is given by:

$$F(Z, W) = \{4/[\Gamma(3+2\gamma)]^2\} (2p\rho)^{2\gamma} \times e^{\pi\alpha ZW/p} |\Gamma(1+\gamma+i\alpha ZW/p)|^2, \quad (5)$$

⁴ Here and in the following are used the rational relativistic units. The unit of energy is mc^2 ; of time, $mc^2/\hbar$; of length, the Compton wavelength, $\hbar/mc$. Ordinary formulae are put into these units by setting m , $\hbar$ and c equal to unity and e^2 to the fine-structure constant $\alpha = e^2/\hbar c$.

⁵ This G is related to the g of Fermi by: $G = gm^2c/(2\pi^2)^{1/2}\hbar^3$.

⁶ B. W. Sargent, Proc. Roy. Soc. A139, 659 (1933).

¹ E. Fermi, Zeits. f. Physik 88, 161 (1934).

² For attempts to observe the neutrino through its magnetic moment, compare J. Chadwick and D. E. Lea, Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc. 30, 59 (1934); M. E. Nahmias, Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc. 31, 99 (1935).

³ G. C. Wick, Atti Lincei 19, 319 (1934). See also §3.

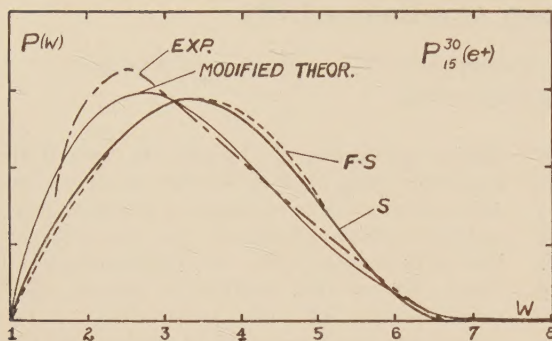


FIG. 1.

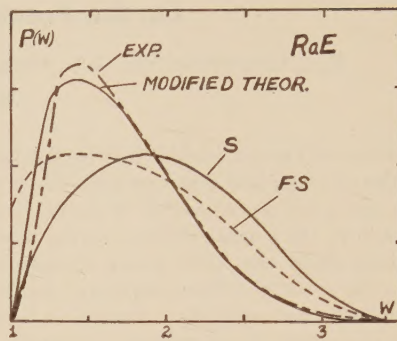


FIG. 2.

FIG. 1. Comparison of the positron distributions given by the statistical factor S , the Fermi formula FS and the modified Fermi formula (see § 4) with the experimental curve of Ellis and Henderson.¹⁹ For S , FS and the experimental curve, $W_0 = 6.54$. For the modified distribution, $W_0 = 8$. The areas under the curves are made equal to each other.

FIG. 2. Comparison of the electron distributions given by the statistical factor S , the Fermi formula FS and the modified Fermi formula (see § 4) with the experimental curve for RaE given in the article of Sargent.¹² For all curves, $W_0 = 3.4$. The areas under each are made equal.

where ρ is the radius of the nucleus, $p = (W^2 - 1)^{1/2}$ and $\gamma = (1 - \alpha^2 Z^2)^{1/2} - 1$. This represents the influence of the Coulomb field of the nucleus on the energy distribution; for $Z = 0$ it reduces to unity.⁷ The remainder of (3) will be referred to as the "statistical factor" and will be symbolized by S .

Such a statistical factor will always occur in the expression for the energy distribution between two particles.⁸ It is proportional to the volume in phase space or the number of states into which each particle can go, thus: $S \sim p_e^2 p_n^2 dp_e dp_n$. This is put in terms of energies for the purpose of comparison with observed spectra and is made independent of quantities connected with the unobserved neutrino by taking into account energy conservation.

§2. COMPARISON WITH EXPERIMENT

Whatever success the Fermi theory may have in explaining the form of the electron and positron spectra is mainly due to the statistical factor. S plotted against W gives a distribution curve having the general shape of the observed distributions (see Figs. 1 and 2). The asymmetry of the curve comes from the difference in the

masses of the two emitted particles.⁹ The factor $F(Z, W)$ has little effect on the form of the distribution curves for light nuclei (compare S and SF in Fig. 1).¹⁰ For the heavy nuclei, $F(Z, W)$ has quite an appreciable effect (see Fig. 2). Although it shifts the maximum toward lower electron energies as the experimental data require, it brings in the serious difficulty that it predicts too many slow electrons.¹¹ Because fast electrons are less influenced by the nuclear attraction, these effects of F will be less marked for spectra with higher maximum energy.

The comparison in Figs. 1 and 2 of the theoretical and experimental distributions for typical, noncomplex positron and electron spectra¹² seems to indicate that the basic

⁹ For a neutrino mass equal to the electron mass the corresponding statistical factor would give a perfectly symmetrical curve. The maximum is shifted toward lower electron energies for smaller neutrino masses. The data, as we shall see, require a strongly asymmetric curve, so that in the present form of the theory, we certainly must take the neutrino mass zero, which Fermi had already done on other grounds.

¹⁰ The theory proposed by Beck and Sitte (Zeits. f. Physik 86, 105 (1933)) takes as the second particle a positron, which is then again captured by the nucleus. Because now the masses of the two particles between which the energy is divided are equal, one must depend entirely on the nuclear field to provide the asymmetry in the distribution. It seems then difficult to account for the similarity of the experimental distributions for heavy and light nuclei and for positron and electron emitters.

¹¹ G. Beck and K. Sitte, Zeits. f. Physik 89, 259 (1934); R. L. Dolecek, Phys. Rev. this issue, p. 13. We want to thank Dr. Dolecek for allowing us to see his paper before its publication.

¹² The data for P used here are taken from C. D. Ellis and W. J. Henderson, Proc. Roy. Soc. A146, 206 (1934):

⁷ Z must be taken positive for electron emitters and negative for positron emitters. Following Fermi we have taken the mass of the neutrino zero. For a finite mass μ , $F(Z, W, \mu)$ is a more complicated function, which for $Z = 0$ reduces to $1 + \mu/W(W_0 - W + \mu)$.

⁸ Compare G. E. Uhlenbeck and S. Goudsmit, Physica, in press.

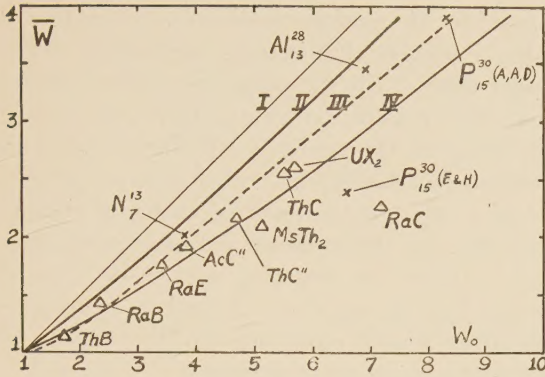


FIG. 3. Comparison of the experimental average energies with theory: I, perfectly symmetrical distribution; II, distribution given by S ($\mu=0$, $Z=0$); III, distribution given by FS with $\mu=0$, $Z=82.2$ (applicable only to the experimental points given by the triangles); IV, distributions given by the modified Fermi theory (see §4) with $\mu=0$, $Z=0$. ${}_{15}\text{P}^{30}$ (E & H) is the value taken from Ellis and Henderson's¹⁹ results, and ${}_{15}\text{P}^{30}$ (A, A & D) from Alichanian, Alichanow and Dzelepov's data. The experimental values for W_0 are used; if the theoretical end points (see Figs. 5, 6 and 7) were used for ${}_{13}\text{Al}^{28}$, ${}_{7}\text{N}^{13}$ and ${}_{15}\text{P}^{30}$ (A, A & D), these points would lie almost on curve IV.

statistical factor does not give a sufficiently asymmetrical distribution. This is further confirmed when one considers the average energies defined by:

$$\bar{W} = \tau \int_1^{W_0} WP(W) dW$$

as a function of W_0 (see Fig. 3). The experimental average energies deviate systematically from the theoretical values computed from the purely statistical distributions in a direction corresponding to greater asymmetry (the straight line represents the average energies of perfectly symmetrical distributions). Taking $F(Z, W)$ into account helps the agreement with the average energies of the β -ray spectra of the heavy elements, although the actual form as we have seen is not represented very well. For the positron emitters the slight (in their case) influence of Z tends to make the distributions more symmetric instead of less as required. It is true that perhaps many of the experimental points are not directly comparable with the theory because of the complex nature of the corresponding spectra. The spectrum of Ra C, for instance, is quite surely the result of a superposition of

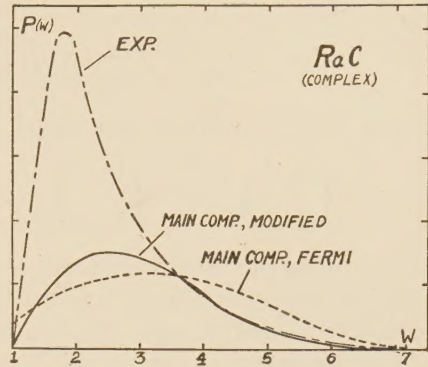


FIG. 4. The main component (weight 0.5) of the complex Ra C spectrum as given by the Fermi and the modified (see §4) theories compared with the observed Ra C spectrum. $W_0=7.16$ for all curves. The area of each component is made equal to one-half the area under the experimental curve.

several spectra having various upper limits. An attempt was made, following Ellis and Mott,¹³ to construct the Ra C curve out of properly weighed components computed from the theory. The result depends very much on what one takes for the populations, which are quite uncertain. One is only sure that the component with the greatest upper limit has at least a population 0.5. We have therefore drawn in Fig. 4 only this main component of the theoretical curve, giving it one-half the area of the experimental curve. Because of the lack of asymmetry of the theoretical curve it is clear that no agreement can be obtained.

§3. THE FERMI INTERACTION "ANSATZ"

To see how the Fermi theory can be modified so as to agree better with experiment it is necessary to examine more closely the fundamental "Ansatz" made for the interaction of the heavy particle with the electron-neutrino field. In analogy to radiation theory the interaction term of the total Hamiltonian is made up of the scalar product of two polar four-vectors, and is written:

¹³ C. D. Ellis and N. F. Mott, Proc. Roy. Soc. **A141**, 502 (1933), composed the Ra C spectrum of curves made geometrically similar to the Ra E distribution curve. The upper limit and the weight of each component were calculated from the known energy levels of the product nucleus (Ra C') and their populations as obtained from γ -ray data. These populations must be revised according to the later experimental results of Rutherford, Lewis and Bowden, Proc. Roy. Soc. **A142**, 347 (1933).

compare with this Fig. 5, §4. The Ra E curve was obtained from B. W. Sargent, Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc. **24**, 538 (1932).

$$H = Q[A_0 + (\vec{\alpha}_{\text{heavy}} \cdot \vec{A})] + Q^*[A_0^* + (\vec{\alpha}_{\text{heavy}} \cdot \vec{A})^*]. \quad (6)$$

Here Q and Q^* are the Heisenberg matrices:

$$Q = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \quad Q^* = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix},$$

which operate on the inner coordinate ρ of the heavy particle, which in turn determines whether the particle is a neutron ($\rho = +1$) or a proton ($\rho = -1$). Q corresponds to the proton to neutron transition and Q^* to the reverse. The components of $\vec{\alpha}_{\text{heavy}}$ are the Dirac matrices which operate on the spin coordinate of the heavy particle.¹⁴ The four vector A is built up out of the quantized wave functions ψ and φ of the electron and neutrino according to:

$$A_0 = \psi \delta \varphi, \quad \vec{A} = \psi \vec{\delta} \alpha \varphi, \quad (7)$$

where

$$\delta = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -1 & 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & -1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

The above choice of A is made to insure that a neutron to proton transition is accompanied by the creation of an electron and a neutrino. This becomes clear when ψ and φ are developed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \psi &= \sum_s a_s \psi_s, & \varphi &= \sum_\sigma b_\sigma \varphi_\sigma, \\ \psi_s^* &= \sum_s a_s^* \psi_s^*, & \varphi_\sigma^* &= \sum_\sigma b_\sigma^* \varphi_\sigma^*. \end{aligned} \quad (8)$$

According to the method of second quantization,¹⁵ a_s^* and b_σ^* are operators indicating the creation of an electron in state s and a neutrino in state σ ; a_s and b_σ are correspondingly the destruction operators. Introducing (8) into (7), one sees that H will now contain the combinations $Q^* a_s^* b_\sigma^*$ and $Q a_s b_\sigma$. The first combination is responsible for the electron emission and the

second for the positron emission. To see this one must remember that in order to obtain a definite upper limit of the spectrum, Fermi must assume that the negative energy states of *both* the electron and the neutrino are filled in the Dirac fashion. In the electron emission term, $Q^* a_s^* b_\sigma^*$, s and σ refer to the positive states of the light particles. In the positron emission term, the s and σ must be negative states because the destruction of an electron and a neutrino in negative states is equivalent to the creation of a positron and an antineutrino.

Of course it is arbitrary to connect the neutrino with the emission of an electron and the antineutrino with the positron emission. Physically one could just as well interchange the roles of the neutrino and antineutrino. Formally this can be done by constructing a four vector A' in which the wave function of one particle is coupled with the complex conjugate of the other wave function; this will produce in the Hamiltonian combinations $Q^* a_s^* b_\sigma$ and $Q a_s b_\sigma^*$. The only possibility for such a four vector is:

$$A_0' = \psi \varphi^*, \quad \vec{A}' = \psi \vec{\alpha}^* \varphi^*, \quad (9)$$

which is analogous to the familiar current four vector. The choices (7) and (9) are the only two possible polar four-vectors involving products of wave functions only. This can perhaps most easily be seen with the spinor notation.¹⁶ The ψ becomes then the pair of spinors $\psi_{\dot{m}}, \chi_l$ and φ correspondingly $\Psi_{\dot{m}}, X_l$. Combining these into four vectors one finds immediately that there are essentially only four possible, of which two are polar and two axial. The two polar ones are:

$$a_{\dot{m}l} = \psi_{\dot{m}} X_l - \Psi_{\dot{m}} \chi_l, \quad a'_{\dot{m}l} = \psi_{\dot{m}} \Psi_l + X_{\dot{m}} \chi_l$$

which correspond to A and A' , respectively.

One can easily verify that the use of (9) instead of (7) in the Fermi theory gives *exactly* the same results if the neutrino mass μ is zero, as should also be expected from the physical standpoint. If μ is not zero the statistical factor in the distribution formula is the same whether A or A' is used. In the factor $F(Z, W, \mu)$ there are some sign changes so that for $Z=0$ the factor referred to in footnote 7 becomes $1 - \mu/W(W_0 - W + \mu)$. The influence of this factor is very

¹⁴ Fermi neglects the terms involving $\vec{\alpha}_{\text{heavy}}$ because they are roughly of the order v/c times the magnitude of the first term. Here v is the velocity of the heavy particle in the nucleus, so that v/c is about 0.1. One uses here the Dirac equation for the heavy particle only formally to show the analogy with radiation theory. See also Dolecek, reference 11.

¹⁵ See Pauli, *Handbuch der Physik*, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 199. In Fermi's paper the formulae defining a_s and a_s^* have to be interchanged.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Laporte and Uhlenbeck, *Phys. Rev.* **37**, 1380 (1931).

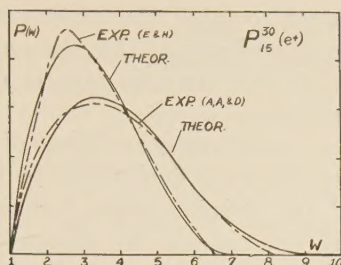


FIG. 5.

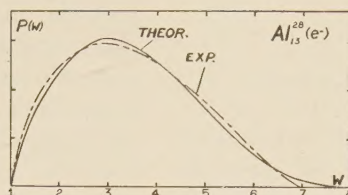


Fig. 6.

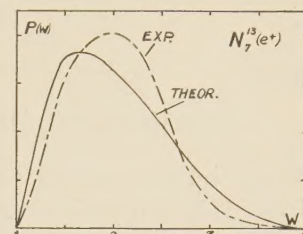


FIG. 7.

FIG. 5. The experimental distributions for the positrons from $^{15}\text{P}^{30}$ as given by Ellis and Henderson¹⁹ with $W_0=6.54$ and by Alichanian, Alichanow and Dzelepov¹⁹ with $W_0=8.34$. According to the modified Fermi theory, $W_0=8$ and 10.6 .

FIG. 6. Comparison of the distributions of the electrons from radio-aluminum as given by the experiments of Alichanian, Alichanow and Dzelepov¹⁹ and by the modified theory. Experimental $W_0=6.97$. Theoretical $W_0=8.8$.

FIG. 7. Distributions of positrons from radio-nitrogen as given by the experiments of Alichanian, Alichanow and Dzelepov¹⁹ and by the modified theory. Experimental $W_0=3.84$, theoretical $W_0=4.4$.

small and does *not* improve the agreement with experiment. Hereafter we will always take $\mu=0$.

§4. A MODIFICATION OF THE INTERACTION ANSATZ

As we saw in §2, the experimental data both for light and heavy nuclei, whether they are electron or positron emitters, seem to give the impression that the basic distribution is more asymmetrical than the one provided by the statistical factor S . If we may believe this, one must require even for $Z=0$ in addition to the always present statistical factor a weight factor which gives preference to low electron energies or high neutrino energies. This requirement could be fulfilled in a simple, empirical way by multiplying (3) by a power of the neutrino energy W_0-W . In terms of the formalism of the Fermi theory, this is accomplished by introducing derivatives of the neutrino wave functions into the Ansatz for the interaction energy.

We will show that one can construct essentially only one polar four vector involving the wave functions of the electron and the derivatives of the neutrino wave functions. To do this, we shall employ the second point of view, mentioned in §3 in which the emission of an antineutrino is connected with the electron emission. Using the γ_i matrices and the notation of Pauli,¹⁷ we can form only the following three polar four vectors:

$$\begin{aligned} B_i &= \psi^\dagger \partial \varphi / \partial x_i, \\ C_i &= \psi^\dagger M_{i\alpha} \partial \varphi / \partial x_\alpha, \quad M_{ij} = \gamma_i \gamma_j \delta_{ij}, \quad (10) \\ D_i &= \psi^\dagger \gamma_i (\gamma_\alpha \partial \varphi / \partial x_\alpha). \end{aligned}$$

Remembering that the wave equation of the neutrino, with $\mu=0$, is: $\gamma_\alpha \partial \varphi / \partial x_\alpha = 0$, one sees that D_i is identically zero. Furthermore, the first component of C_i , for example, is:

$$\begin{aligned} \psi^\dagger \gamma_1 \left(\gamma_2 \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x_2} + \gamma_3 \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x_3} + \gamma_4 \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x_4} \right) \\ = \psi^\dagger \gamma_1 \left(-\gamma_1 \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x_1} \right) = -\psi^\dagger \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x_1}, \end{aligned}$$

so that $C_i = -B_i$. The only vector which remains, B_i , can be written with the Dirac matrices, leaving off a factor i :

$$B_0 = \psi^* \beta \partial \varphi / \partial t, \quad \vec{B} = \psi^* \beta \text{grad } \varphi. \quad (11)$$

Besides the vectors (10), there are, of course, possible three more if we adopt the original viewpoint of Fermi, connecting the electron with the neutrino emission, which again reduce to one when the neutrino wave equation is applied. Since, for $\mu=0$, the two points of view always give the same result there remains really only the vector B_i .¹⁸

Substituting the vector B_i for A_i in the derivation of the Eq. (3) for the distribution, following Fermi's calculations closely and making

¹⁸ With the spinor notation both sets of vectors are obtained at the same time just as $a_{\mu l}$ and $a_{\mu l}'$ in §3. One can then make the analogous reduction to one vector and in this way the proof of the uniqueness of B_i is perhaps made more convincing.

¹⁷ Pauli, *Handbuch der Physik*, Volume 24, No. 1, p. 220.

the same approximations, one obtains with $Z=0$:

$$P(W)dW$$

$$= G^2 |M|^2 (W_0 - W)^4 (W^2 - 1)^{\frac{1}{2}} W dW. \quad (12)$$

If Z were not put equal to zero one has again to multiply (12) with the factor $F(Z, W)$ given by (5).

In Figs. 1, 5, 6 and 7 the distribution given by (12) is compared with the experimental data¹⁹ for $^{15}\text{P}^{30}$, $^{7}\text{N}^{13}$ (positron emitters) and $^{13}\text{Al}^{28}$ (electron emitter). In these cases the factor F is negligible, and it seems that (12) gives the required asymmetry. Because it appears that the experimental values for the upper limits are not very certain, and because the curve (12) tails off very slowly to zero near W_0 , so that the end would be hardly observable, we have adjusted the upper limits somewhat.²⁰ In Fig. 3 this would shift the points for P and Al to the right and bring them nearly on the theoretical curve IV. For Ra E (12) also represents the observed distribution rather well as is seen in Fig. 2. However, in this case F is *not* negligible and should be included. As in the Fermi theory the theoretical distribution will then *not* go to zero for $W=1$, so that the change in the interaction energy does *not* remove this difficulty.

§5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. The choice of B in the interaction energy fulfills just as A all the *a priori* requirements which Fermi set down at the beginning of his paper. Besides the fact that B seems to give better agreement with the data, it may have significance that in B enter the energy and impulse operators of the neutrino. The neutrino

¹⁹ Ellis and Henderson, Proc. Roy. Soc. **A146**, 206 (1934); Alichanow, Alichanian and Dzelepov, Zeits. f. Physik **93**, 350 (1935). The experimental curves for P disagree with each other. We have shown them both in Figs. 1 and 5. The fact that each can be fitted by a theoretical curve indicates that they have the same kind of asymmetry.

²⁰ Increasing the upper limits will also tend to remove the discrepancy between Chadwick's value for the mass of the neutron and the value given by Curie and Joliot (Nature **133**, 721 (1934)). Raising the upper limit and the kinetic energy of the neutron together by about 1.5 MEV would bring down the Curie-Joliot mass to the Chadwick value. If (12) really represents the form of the β -ray spectrum, an error of this order of magnitude can easily be understood, especially for the spectra with high upper limits.

has been introduced to fulfill the conservation laws, so that we may perhaps say that the energy and the impulse of the neutrino are its only observable properties.

2. We have also considered other forms of the interaction energy involving derivatives both of the electron and the neutrino wave functions, with the hope of diminishing the influence of $F(Z, W)$ for the heavy elements near $W=1$. By using the neutrino wave equation the number of independent polar four vectors containing the derivatives of both wave functions narrows down to two:

$$K_i = \frac{\partial \psi^\dagger}{\partial x_\alpha} \gamma_i \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x_\alpha}, \quad L_i = \frac{\partial \psi^\dagger}{\partial x_\alpha} \gamma_\alpha \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x_i}.$$

For $Z=0$ L_i reduces to B_i . We did not succeed however, either with these vectors or with a linear combination of them, in bringing down the distribution curve near $W=1$ and keeping the required asymmetry at the same time.

3. Our modification of the form of the interaction energy does not of course affect Fermi's explanation of Sargent's law, nor does it change the order of magnitude of G . The essential difficulty of the Fermi theory as pointed out by Nordsieck and Tamm²¹ therefore remains. Because of the smallness of G the interaction between the neutron and the proton through the electron-neutrino field is much too weak to account for the experimental results on neutron-proton scattering. Nordsieck computes the cross section for inelastic scattering (the colliding neutron is transformed into a proton, emitting an electron and a neutrino) and finds a convergent result of the order $G^2 d^2$ where $d = e^2/mc^2$. The elastic collision cross section comes out even smaller ($\sim G^4 d^2 (M/m)^2 \alpha^{-2}$) if the integral occurring in it, which diverges as $\int^\infty dp/p$, may be cut off at $p \sim 1/\alpha$ and considered of the order of magnitude unity. With the modified interaction these calculations are changed essentially only in the fact that the integral in the elastic cross section diverges as $\int^\infty p dp$. If we may again take the upper limit as $1/\alpha$ this would make the elastic cross section at least $(137)^4$ times as large as Nordsieck's value. This is, however, by far not enough to remove the discrepancy.

²¹ A. Nordsieck, Phys. Rev. **46**, 234 (1934); Ig. Tamm, Nature **133**, 981 (1934).

Higher Order Derivatives in the Interaction "Ansatz" of the Fermi Theory¹

Since there are theoretical arguments² for introducing higher order derivatives in the interaction of the heavy particle with the electron-neutrino field, we have investigated the effect of such a change on the form of the continuous electron or positron spectra. We shall consider only the light nuclei so that the influence of the nuclear charge Z may be neglected; furthermore we shall take the neutrino mass μ equal to zero.

The polar four-vector which is needed to make up the interaction energy may be formed with the help of the gradient vector $\partial/\partial x_i$ and the quantities γ_i , M_{ij} and k_{ijk} .³ The possibilities with the gradient alone, for example, are:

$$(m+1, m)_i = \frac{\partial}{\partial x_i} \cdot \frac{\partial^m \psi^\dagger}{\partial x_\alpha \cdots \partial x_\beta} \cdot \frac{\partial^m \varphi}{\partial x_\alpha \cdots \partial x_\beta}, \quad (1)$$

$$(m, m+1)_i = \frac{\partial^m \psi^\dagger}{\partial x_\alpha \cdots \partial x_\beta} \cdot \frac{\partial}{\partial x_i} \cdot \frac{\partial^m \varphi}{\partial x_\alpha \cdots \partial x_\beta}. \quad (2)$$

The order of the derivatives of $\psi^\dagger$ and φ must differ by unity only, because otherwise factors like $\partial^2 \psi^\dagger / \partial x_\alpha \partial x_\alpha$ or $\partial^2 \varphi / \partial x_\alpha \partial x_\alpha$ would occur. From the second order Dirac wave equations for the electron and neutrino, which, with $Z=0$ and $\mu=0$ are

$$\partial^2 \psi^\dagger / \partial x_\alpha \partial x_\alpha + \psi^\dagger = 0, \quad \partial^2 \varphi / \partial x_\alpha \partial x_\alpha = 0,$$

such factors would cause the vector to vanish or to reduce to one of the forms (1) or (2). Making use also of the first order Dirac equations

$$(\partial \psi^\dagger / \partial x_\alpha) \cdot \gamma_\alpha + \psi^\dagger = 0, \quad \gamma_\alpha (\partial \varphi / \partial x_\alpha) = 0,$$

one can reduce all the other four-vectors, involving γ_i , M_{ij} and k_{ijk} , to three types and their linear combinations.⁴ These three types are (1), (2) and

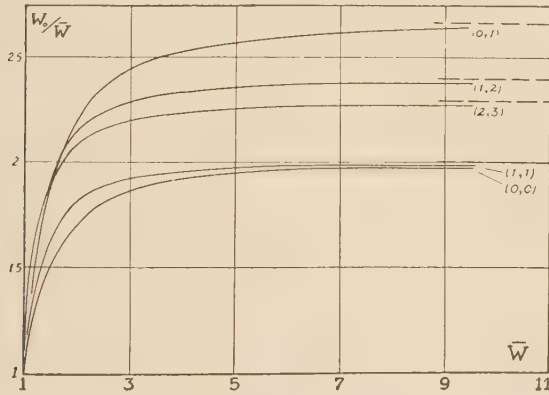


FIG. 1.

$$(m, m)_i = \frac{\partial^m \psi^\dagger}{\partial x_\alpha \cdots \partial x_\beta} \cdot \gamma_i \cdot \frac{\partial^m \varphi}{\partial x_\alpha \cdots \partial x_\beta}. \quad (3)$$

Four-vectors of the type (1) can be immediately excluded. Since the order of the derivative of the electron wave function is higher than that of the neutrino wave function, these vectors would lead to energy distributions which give greater weight to high electron energies than the original Fermi theory. This, as we have seen in I, §2, is in conflict with the experimental facts. The energy distribution resulting from the four-vectors (2) and (3) for different values of m are:

$$\begin{aligned} (0,0): & P \sim W(W^2-1)^{1/2}(W_0-W)^2, \\ (0,1): & P \sim W(W^2-1)^{1/2}(W_0-W)^4, \\ (1,1): & P \sim W(W^2-1)^{1/2}(4W^2-1)(W_0-W)^4, \\ (1,2): & P \sim W(W^2-1)^{1/2}(4W^2-1)(W_0-W)^6, \\ (2,2): & P \sim W(W^2-1)^{1/2}[(4W^2-1)^2-4W^2](W_0-W)^6, \\ (2,3): & P \sim W(W^2-1)^{1/2}[(4W^2-1)^2-4W^2](W_0-W)^8. \end{aligned}$$

(0,0) is the original Fermi distribution for $Z=0$, which is just the statistical factor; (0,1) is the distribution proposed in I, §4. In these equations W is the total energy of the electron measured in units.

Although, in order to make a definite decision, a direct comparison of the above formulae with the experimental distributions should be made, an indication can be obtained by considering the relation between the average energy $\bar{W}$ and the maximum energy W_0 . In Fig. 1 we have plotted $W_0/\bar{W}$ as a function of $\bar{W}$ for the different formulae. $\bar{W}$ is chosen as abscissa since it can be determined experimentally much more accurately than W_0 . The curves corresponding to interactions of the type (3) all approach an asymptote at $W_0/\bar{W}=2$. The type (2) curves also have horizontal asymptotes but these vary with m and are given by $W_0/\bar{W}=(4m+8)/(2m+3)$.

From the empirical material now available it seems that one can already exclude interactions of the type (3). They lead to distributions which have about the same degree of asymmetry as the simple statistical factor (0,0) and are therefore just as unsatisfactory (see I, §2). The recent results of Crane, Delsasso, Fowler and Lauritsen⁵ on the high energy β -ray spectra of B^{12} , Li^8 and F^{20} may allow a decision on the value of m in the interactions of type (2). The average energies of these spectra are respectively $\bar{W}=9.0, 8.6, 4.8$ in our units; the upper energies are about $W_0=23, 22, 11.5$. If the average energies can be regarded as correct within a few percent then, by finding a lower limit to W_0 , one can set a lower limit to $W_0/\bar{W}$. All the interactions whose asymptotes are below this value can then be eliminated. For example, in the case of Li , if $W_0 \geq 20$, $\bar{W}=8.6 \pm 0.1$, then $W_0/\bar{W} \geq 2.3$ so that already the (2,3) interaction is excluded. The distribution curve given by (2,3) is also quite unlike the empirical energy distribution.

Of course, theoretically, also linear combinations of interactions of the different types or of different orders are possible. Since, however, interactions of type (3) and of type (2) for larger m give comparatively symmetrical distributions, already the study of the asymmetry of the high energy β -ray spectra will make it possible to restrict the amount with which the higher order derivatives can be present in the interaction function.

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June 16, 1935.

¹ This is an extension of our paper (hereafter cited as I) in the Phys. Rev. 48, 7 (1935) to which reference is made for further details. We continue to use the same notation, units, etc.

² W. Heisenberg, Zeeman Jubilee Papers, Nijhoff, The Hague, 1935, p. 108.

³ See Pauli, *Handbuch der Physik*, Vol. 24, 1, p. 220.

⁴ For an example of such a reduction see I, §4.

⁵ Crane, Delsasso, Fowler and Lauritsen, Phys. Rev. 47, 887, 971 (1935).

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